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“Upper Egyptian Regionally Based Communities in Cairo: Traditional or Modern Forms of Urbanization?”

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1. The event: a press campaign

In July 2002, during a three weeks period, ones could read some rather provocative newspaper headlines such as: *mutâradat as-sa'âida fî-shawâri' al-qâhira* (“Chasing away Sa'îdi-s from Cairo streets”, *Al-Ahrâr* 19/7/2002), or *as-sa'âida yahtajun 'ala khittat al-muhâfiz bi-mana'ihim min dukhûl al-qâhira* (“Upper Egyptians are indignant at the Governor's plan to forbid them from entering Cairo”, *Rôz al-Yûsif* 12/7/02), or again *hal ya'amir muhâfiz al-qâhira bi-tarhîl Shaykh al-Azhar w-al-Bâbâ Shenûda?* (“Does the Governor plot to expel the Shaykh of Al-Azhar and Pope Shenouda?”, *Al-Mîdan* 27/7/02). These were parts of a press campaign involving mainly “opposition” newspapers, against the alleged decision of the Governor of Cairo that migration flows from *as-sa'id* (Upper Egypt) and *al-rîf* (rural areas, meaning here Northern rural Areas) to Cairo should be regulated and limited in order to preserve the urban stability.

Apparently, nobody from Northern Rural Egypt dare to react to the Governor's statement. It was exclusively interpreted in terms of a confrontation between the Governor (the State) and members of the Upper Egyptian population in Cairo. The same governor had been already previously suspected by some Upper Egyptian journalists of being “anti-sa'îdi” (*al-Usbû'* 27/4/1998). This press campaign was analyzed by some observers as a mobilization of the “Sa'îdi lobby” (*al-Jîl* 17/7/2002) and was counteracted by some more official newspapers (*Al-Akhbâr* 4/8/2002). But behind ‘the tempest in a teapot’, it was one of the many

manifestations of the tensions between the State Apparatus and some segments of the Cairene Upper Egyptian population and it raises the question of the interaction between the city and its migrant population.

2. Migration and affiliation

The perception that massive migration, either internal (i.e. from rural/provincial areas) or external (from other countries), is a destabilizing factor for urban development can be considered as a kind of universal public “meta-narratives” in periods of rapid urban expansion due to migration. The migrants, who come to join the low-income urban classes, have always been perceived as different and potentially dangerous for the social order (Wacquant 1997; Schnapper 2001). In case of internal migration, the “refine civilization” of the city is viewed as threatened by the anarchic “ruralization” of its periphery. To remain in Egypt and Cairo (but the same could be found since the early antiquity in any city of the world), the inhabitant of the 16th –19th c. popular peripheries of Cairo were described as *fallâhîn* “peasants” by Jabârî or as *rîfî* “rural” by the urban elite (Raymond 1987), and they were always considered as a source of problems including by the early 20th century social reformists (Rousillon 1996).

But the case of Upper Egyptians in contemporary Cairo reveals dynamics usually associated with “minority” groups, i.e. foreign migrant communities or national/ religious/ ethnic communities in multi-ethnic/multi-cultural states. For these minorities, migration and urbanization often create, reprocess or reinforce communal or ethnic affiliation (the we-group) in a context of growing interaction and otherness.

Egypt is not a multi-ethnic country (the Nubians forming the only major ‘non-Arab local group) and is known for its strong political centralism and its rather Jacobean nationalism. Upper Egyptians in Cairo do not constitute a local religious or non-Arab minority, nor a

foreign migrant community. Following the settlement of the former Bedouin groups in the 19th c, tribal or clanic affiliation in Egypt is not considered to be an important means of contemporary social identification, except in the Egyptian desert margins (Baer 1967). Therefore communalism/sectarianism is not supposed to shape the spatial and social distribution of the contemporary Cairene society and Upper Egyptian migrants, like all other Egyptian migrants would be expected to progressively melt within the cities. However there are evidences that Upper Egyptians are often perceived, in the public discourse, as being more “specific” than the other regional migrants and less prone to integration. They are said to form regional “pockets” within the city, and they start to be overtly engaged in a process of identification to a collective *Sa’idi* (Upper Egyptian) grouping.

Starting from this event, I wish to address three questions:

- Why do Cairene Upper Egyptians appear so often as the ‘internal Other’ in the Egyptian media and in the various public narratives? Why is their integration to the urban setting conceived as “more problematic” than the others, on the eve of the 21st century, at a time where internal migration to Cairo has considerably slowed down?
- What is the relevance and the strength of regional-based communal networks (or regional communities) in the social structuring of contemporary Cairo? What are the criteria which enable one to assess the relevance of communal affiliation in this “Global city”?
- Are communal networks/communities the expression of traditional local types of organization or are they the expression of new social constructs, induced by urbanization and migration?

These questions raise the issue of ‘otherness and boundaries’, i.e. identity construction in urban context. They echo also a long-standing debate concerning the status of “communities” within Middle Eastern cities. In this respect, the dynamics recorded in Global Cairo indicate

that communal/regional networks cannot be analyzed in terms of archaic remains of a rural past. Like kinship, group feeling (*'asabiyya*) are modern urban social constructs and are implicated in on-going processes of becoming (Bocco 1995, Eickelman 2002, Salibi 1992). In this paper, particular attention is given to the interlocking between past and present. If the contemporary trends of Cairo are universal and can be analyzed with the tools developed by western Social Sciences, it is also the specific memory and history of the City, which makes it unique.

3. Upper Egyptians in Cairo: Intruders or urbanites?

The factors that led to the perception that Upper Egyptians form a distinct group among the Cairene population are many (for more details see Miller 2004). The interlocking of three main factors - the historical divide between Upper and Northern Egypt, the economic underdevelopment and the recent political instability of Upper Egypt – has crystallized the stigmatized vision of Upper Egyptians.

For many centuries the links between Cairo and Upper Egypt have been rather scarce (Garcin 1987). In the 15th-16th century, Upper Egyptians represented only 30% of the Egyptian migrant population and they were less numerous than the Syrian population. Few Upper Egyptians were recorded among the Cairene religious or merchant elite (Petry 1981). On the opposite, the presence of religious notables from the Delta reinforced the cultural and social relationship between Cairo and its northern hinterland and facilitated the integration of the migrants from Lower Egypt (Garcin 1969). The presence of Upper Egyptians *ulâma*-s started to become more important in the second part of the 18th century, as attested by the creation of a Sa'îdi *riwâq* (Upper Egyptian lodge) in Al-Azhar. In the second part of the 19th century, a number of Upper Egyptians joined the new institutes created by Mohammed Ali in order to form a new reformist elite. Some of them became famous national figures, such as al-

Tahtâwi, and a few intellectual figures, like the Shaykh Al Marâri, were engaged in a kind of cultural revalorization of Upper Egypt. But the presence of Upper Egyptians never enriches the level of the Lower Egyptians and the socio-cultural distance between Upper and Lower Egypt remains until now.

The economic gulf between Lower and Upper Egypt goes back to the 18-19th centuries when the development of a market economy led to the economic marginalization of Upper Egypt (Baer 1967; Gran 1998; Holt 1967). From the late 19th c., many Upper Egyptians started to migrate to the North, working as seasonal daily laborers (Abu Lughod 1961; Baer 1967; El Messiri 1983). Until the early 1970s, 4/5 of the Upper Egyptian migrants in Cairo were male, while migrants from the Delta were already established in families. Upper Egyptians still represent an important percentage of Cairene daily laborers, who can be seen waiting for employment in the Cairo streets (Zohri 2002). Today, Upper Egypt is still considered as the “neglected impoverished region” of the country and its underdevelopment has been considered as one of the main factors leading to political violence (*Al Ahrâm Weekly*, Sept. 1996).

In the 1990s, the Islamic movements have been particularly active in Upper Egypt and also in the Cairene popular settlements known as *sakan al ‘ashwâ’i*. Although Upper Egyptian migrants represent only a small percentage (no precise data available) of the inhabitants of these settlements, they were believed to be demographically dominant and to be particularly attracted by Islamist activism, because of their alleged culture of “violence” symbolized by the vendetta (Haenni 2001). Again, some newspapers did not hesitate to publish headlines such as *Imbâba qumbulat as-Sa’âida* (“Imbaba, the bomb of the Upper Egyptians”, *Rôz al-Yûsif* 15/2/1999). The cultural-oriented perception of Upper Egypt, which has been so prevalent in many movies, TV series (*musalsalât*), novels and jokes, was reinforced by the 1990s political and media discourses, which contributed to spread the notion

that Upper Egypt was indeed a specific area, characterized by its cultural conservatism, its reluctance to modernity and even its violence.

The combination of all those factors participated to the fact that Upper Egyptians in Cairo, who belonged to all social classes, and whose some members have been top public figures, tend, nevertheless, to be collectively identified with the poor unskilled migrants and are often associated to the stigmatized perception of the *ashwa 'iyyât*, described as the locus of extremism, crime and poverty (Denis 1994; Haenni 2001; Singerman 1999). These stereotypes, portraying either the “poor traditional rural migrant unable to accommodate” or even the “dangerous internal other disrupting urban peace”, reinforced the resentment of many Upper Egyptians in Cairo, who feel that they are particularly targeted and stigmatized. And it may be noted that the term *sa 'îdi*, i.e. “Upper Egyptian”, is often used (in the jokes for example) instead of the traditional terms *fallâh* “peasant” or *rîfî* “rural” to symbolize (embody?) the concepts of rurality, backwardness, lack of urban sophistication, and the like.

This stigma can shape many daily interactions and is particularly difficult to live for the young educated Upper Egyptians who came to stay in Cairo. Many university graduates I met, complained that it was difficult for them to engage in a romance with a Cairene girl, without being mocked at a time or another as being a typical underdeveloped Sa'îdi (*muthakhallif*) because of their way of acting or speaking. And indeed, I witnessed many painful interactions and many unsuccessful attempts of getting engaged with a young Cairo lady. The failure was always analyzed in terms of cultural incompatibility by both parties.

A number of Cairene Upper Egyptians have been reacting to these stereotypes and, in a typical process of ethnicization, have developed their own discourse praising the pride of their origin (*'asl*), their supposed specific Upper Egyptian ethos and their refusal to melt with the dominant Cairene urban culture, described as decadent and westernized (Miller 2004). The tensions between the migrants and the ruling urban groups are not described in socio-

economic terms (poor migrants versus well-off urbanites), but are interpreted, by both sides, as the result of a deep cultural and communal difference.

4. Impact of migration on the cities and its migrants

But behind the stereotypes and the discourses, what has been the practical social/cultural impact of migration upon the migrant groups and upon the social structuring of the city? Already in 1961, J. Abu Lughod (1961, 23) was mentioning the probability that migrants were shaping the culture of the city as much as they were adjusting to it, and that there were no chance that they will all get totally assimilated. But for long, the socio-cultural influence of the migrants within the Cairene society has never been properly investigated (El Kadi 1995). The main impact of the migrants' presence was described in terms of "ruralization" of the urban periphery, although the rural migration trend has slowed considerably since the 1970s (Denis and Bayat 1999). This ruralization conception was criticized by a number of urban social studies, which refused the perception that migrants stick to "traditional" forms of organization and which highlighted the shift to other forms of solidarity and the know-how of the new urban citizens (Deboulet 1994, 1995, 1996; Oldham et al 1987). If the efficiency and relevance of kinship and family ties is well established in the Egyptian urban context (Hopkins 2003; Rugh 1985; Singerman 1995), the role of clanic or regional networks is more controversial.

Investigating Upper Egyptian migrants' personal networks in Cairo between 1994-1998 in various informal settlements of Gizah, (the southern Governorate of Greater Cairo), I came across two main findings. The first one was the relative importance of regional-based or village-based or kin-based networks among the migrants and the importance of the ethic of *qarâba* 'closeness', which symbolically divides the society between "kin" and "foreigners" (Miller 2000). The second was the development of an Upper Egyptian identity (*as-sa'idiyya*).

This identity, described in terms of adherence to a specific origin (*'asl*) that transcends residential location, was claimed by many young educated Upper Egyptian males, even those born in Cairo and belonging to the second or third generation (Miller 2004). The valorization of both closeness (*qarâba*) and origin (*'asala*) participates in shaping a specific vision of urban territories.

My findings were rather different from what have been generally observed. Many urban and historical studies on Cairo have indicated that a) communal networks and organizations were pre-modern phenomena, which disappeared following the urban transformation of the second part of the 20th century and that b) communal/regional solidarity among migrants characterized the first phase of settlement and shifted progressively to new forms of solidarity and new social links based primarily on neighborhood (Deboulet 1994; Ghanem 2002; Hoodfar 1997; Singerman 1995). This apparent contradiction led me to investigate the evolution of Cairo social organization, and more particularly the role of communal/regional networks in both past and present time, in order to analyze their roots and contemporary relevance.

The role and status of “communities” appear controversial for both past and present times and very little is known about regional networks in Cairo. The communities, like the family, has often been conceived as a rather static and specific entity. Therefore the description of pre-modern Cairo social structures in terms of “communities” was criticized for overstressing segregation and immobility. But a more fluid and contextual conception of identity indicates that communal/regional affiliations are not fix and can express new forms of grouping as we shall see with the *'asabiyya*.

5. The city and its communities: Historical overview

Communities, known as *tawâ'if*, are considered to have represented an important social, spatial and juridical reality of Ottoman Cairo, particularly within the *hâra*, the old established popular districts of Cairo (Abu Lughod 1971; Al-Massiri-Nadim 1979; Lapidus 1984; Petry 1981; Raymond 1993). The term *tawâ'if* refers indistinctly to professional guilds, religious and ethnic groups or to “quarter groups” (Raymond 1994).

The most precisely identified Ottoman Cairene *tawâ'if* have been the “ethnic” or “national foreign” communities like the Maghrebans, the Palestinians, the Syrians, the Turks, the Armenians or the Greek, as well as the religious minorities like the Jewish and the Christians. All these communities were characterized by various degrees of spatial segregation and professional specialization and have their own jurisdiction and confessional representation. Spatial clustering was more marked in the 18th–19th centuries for the religious groups, particularly in Mari Girgis (99% Coptic) and Harat al Yahud (97,5% Jewish, cf. Alleaume and Fargues 1998). It was less marked for the non-Egyptian Muslim communities of the 16th-18th c., although the North Africans tend to cluster around Ibn Touloun, the Turks around Khan al Khalîli, the Palestinians in the Gamaliyya, etc. (Raymond 1983, 1988, 1990, 1994). However, spatial and social segregation was relative and there were no ghetto-like isolation of the communities (Lapidus 1984, 67).

Little is known about an eventual regional-based specialization and spatial distribution of the Egyptian Cairene Population. Egyptians, who belonged to the two main social categories, the *'amma* “populace” and the *Khassa* “elite”, have been identified by opposition to the other communities; i.e. as “natives” *vis à vis* “foreigners” and as “Muslims” *vis à vis* “non-Muslims”. The few available information concern the spatial distribution of the religious and civilian elite, the origin of the *Ulâma* and the regional organization of the Lodges (*riwâq*) in Al Azhâr (Garcin 1969; Petry 1981; Raymond 1987 & 1994). From this, we know that Al Azhâr had regional-based *riwâq*: the *Sa'aïdah* (for Upper Egyptians), the *Sharaqwah* (for

North East Delta), the *Fayyûmiyah* (Fayyoun) the *Baharwah* (North West Delta) as there were “foreign” *riwâq* like those of the *Takrûr* (West Africans), *Maghârba* (North Africans) or *Shawâm* (Syrians). There were few contacts between the followers of each *riwâq* and the regional migrants, like the members of the other communities, tended to cluster around their local *zawiyya* “mosque”, *khandaq* “hostel” and *wakâla* “caravansary” (Raymond 1987). It is possible that the regional migrants, and particularly the Upper Egyptians who had less contact with Cairo, were no more and no less “integrated” than the members of the other communities, but this point has never been raised. And unlike many other Middle Eastern cities, we have no details of specific regional spatial clustering within the city, or of quarters inhabited by a specific tribal group, etc.

Popular quarters (*hâra*-s) are often described as forming homogeneous social units in terms of occupations or ethnic or religious origins and as having a strong local identity (Abu Lughod 1971; El-Messiri 1978; Raymond 1993). The supposed “group feeling” of the *hâra* was expressed through collective demonstrations such as the *mawlid*-s (religious celebrations), the religious processions, the popular riots, the struggle between the different *hâra*-s, etc. (Raymond 1987). But the basis of this homogeneity is not detailed and is still problematic. It is not clear if the cohesion of each *hâra* was due to the relatively homogenous ethnic/regional origin of its inhabitants or to a process of identification to a shared space, the quarter. In the first case, the group feeling would have been based primarily on the notion of a common origin and of a shared affiliation. On the second case, it would have been based on neighborhood links and on the fact of sharing the same space, the same urban culture. Claimed kinship or common origin are often fictive ascendance and include numerous non-kin persons who came to share the same space. But even as myths, they participate in the shaping of a genealogical perception of the society.

But, whatever have been the real bases of communities in pre-modern Cairo, it is usually acknowledged that the social and political transformations of the late 19th –early 20th centuries disrupted the social organization of the religious/ethnic communities and the social unit of the quarters (Baer 1967). Communalism does not appear to shape anymore the city.

5. The city and its communities: Contemporary overview

The melting of the former national Muslim communities (Maghreban, Palestinian, Turks) with the Egyptian population were achieved in the second part of the 19th century. The administrative and juridical dissolution of the other religious and national communities started from the early 20th century and concretized in the dissolution of the confessional jurisdictions in 1955 (Abecassis and Kazazian 1992). Since then, these communities disappeared or melt, the Jewish emigrated and the Christians spread in various districts according to their class levels.

The architectural transformation of the old quarters, the extension of Cairo, the creation of new quarters, the movement of population, all led to the transformation and renewal of the *hâra* population and to the weakening of its homogeneous composition (if it never existed!). Today the spatial distribution of the population is defined by social levels with rich (*râqî*) and popular (*baladî/sha'abî*) neighborhoods. Among the popular areas however, a distinction must be drawn between the old established ones and the new ones. Old popular quarters benefit from a kind of historical legitimacy and are perceived as the locus of popular ethic and identity, i.e. the *baladi* identification. Their inhabitants are said to share a strong feeling of solidarity and identification to their quarters (El-Messiri 1978; Ghanam 2002; Singerman 1995). This common identification to the neighborhood does not however totally eradicate other in-group identification like affiliation to an extended kin group or to a village group (Al Messiri-Nadim 1979). But the new popular districts, established since the

1960s-1970s do not benefit from this historical legitimacy and still lack a recognized identity (Ghanam 2002). They are not perceived any more as *baladî* but at best as *sha'abî* “popular” if not ‘*ashwâ’î* “illegal and unplanned”. It is within these areas that the role of communal/regional affiliation versus identification to a common local space has been mentioned.

6. Regional-based affiliation and networks

Information on contemporary regional networks are scanty and scattered. It is therefore difficult to assess if regional networks represent a marginal/transitional phenomenon or, on the contrary, if they constitute an important socio-economic feature of the city.

Because internal migration has been one of the main factor of urban boom since the mid-19th c., it is commonly asserted that at the beginning of the 20th century “natives of a specific village or district migrated to a specific town and specialized in particular occupation” (Baer 1967; Abu Lughod 1961). Examples provided by Baer for the first part of the 20th c. include the Cairo’s porters from Muha village (Asyût), the water carriers from Dar al Baqar (Gharbiyya), etc.

The presence of regional-based professional networks is also mentioned in the 1970s-1980s in both old and new quarters of Cairo. They include the sellers of “*fûl*” in Fatimid Cairo originating from the Oases (Al Messiri-Nadim 1979), the bread makers in down town originating from a village near Asyût (Meyer 1988), the vegetable sellers of Dar al Salam and Rod al Farâg originating from the Sohâg region (Kharoufi 1991 & 1996) , the clothe sellers of Wikalat al Balâh (Bulâq Abu El Eila) originating from the village of Al-Ighâna in Asyût area (Rôz al Yusif 11/111996), the members of a Bedouin specialized in collecting aluminum trash in the Gamaliyya (Stauth 1984), a number of tanners families coming from Upper Egypt (Florin 1999), etc. All these information concern rather limited networks and it is difficult to

assess if these regional specialization constitute an important pattern of what is usually labeled the “informal economic sector”. There are indication that the vegetable-fruit selling sector is highly organized along regional networks and there is a probability that the same occurs in the building sectors of Gizah, where contractors from Upper Egypt tend to play an important role. Upper Egyptian migrants tend to insist on these regional networks and indicate many other examples such as the people of Farshut (Qena) specialized in camel trade or the people of Araba (Sohag) specialized in plaster, etc.

Regional-based or village-based or extended family clustering have also been found in a number of informal settlements or former villages around Cairo (Deboulet 1994; El Kadi 1988; Fakhouri 1987; Florin 1999; Miller 2000; Odlham et al 1987; Taher 1986; Tekce et al 1994, etc.). These clustering are either briefly described as developing sub-cultures with both class and regional characteristics in Cairo (Tekce and al. 1994, 4) but most often, the mentions of regional cluster refer to the first phase of settlement. Settlers’ narratives tell how a group from the same extended family, village or “tribe” came to occupy an empty land or gathered to buy land for building. In many instances, a group of related families are considered to be the “heart” of the historical settlement. They move together, they bought land together when they had the means, they sometimes move from one place to another together. For example in my data, a group of people from Girga settled first in Aguza at the beginning of the 20th c. and then moved together to Nahya (Bulaq ad Dakrur) and Ard El Liwa in the 1950’s-60’s. Another group from Girga moved from Old Cairo to Al Andalus (near Al Ahrâm Str., Gizah) in the 1970s. Another group from the village of ‘Araba (Sohag) moved from Bulaq Abu Eila to Wahda in Imbaba in the 1970s, etc. In the new areas, they constituted what they called *‘izwa*, i.e. an unified group which enables them to survive to hardship and to still play a social or political role in their area. Many places are still commonly identified as the “area of the sons of the village X or the sons of the region Y”.

Through these residential strategies, the settlers develop a particular vision of urban territories and considered that some areas “belong to them “, even if they represent now a demographic minority. But these stories refer to an “heroic past”, the past of the 1970s and 1980s, when the people moved to the unplanned areas of Greater Cairo in order to establish a living. Today all these areas have grown tremendously and their population have diversified, attracting new segments of the Cairene population, fleeing the deterioration of the old Cairo districts (Deboulet 1995). The old “pioneers” often complained that their area, which was before well controlled by well known families have now been invaded (*itlamm*) by “foreigner”, or “intruders” (*dukhâla*) i.e. Cairene from other areas (Miller 2000). At the same time, the educated children of the “pioneer” families established in the 1960s, moved to middle class districts in the 1990s (for example from Abu Atata in Bulaq ed Dakrur to El Faysal) in order to find better accommodation.

Regional-based residential clustering and regional professional networks appear closely linked to the first phase of migration and there is probability that residential clustering will not resist the on going urban transformation. But, for the time being, regional or family networks still ply a very important social role and appear as a strong means of social and political organization. The relevance of regional networks/affiliation should not be restricted to the analyze of residential distribution or professional networks. Regional affiliation can develop through more sophisticated or symbolic tools.

7. From *râbta* to *‘asabiyyât* in Cairo

Regional or communal networks are active at three socio-political levels in Cairo.

- First, regional-based Associations (*râbta*) are the most numerous type of Associations (Ben Nefissa & Qandil 1994), although it is difficult to assess the real vitality of this type of Association. They have play an important role in the 1960s-1970s but seem to be

now less active than the welfare Islamic Associations but they still maintain a link between the Cairene migrants and their original region (Ben Nefissa 1994).

Second, the *majâlis 'urfiya*, “Customary Assemblies, i.e. Reconciliation Assemblies”, which encompass local political personalities as well as representatives of big families or village group or regional group in the districts, are important means of social control and conflict regulation. The *Majâlis 'urfiya* help to solve important neighborhood conflicts and sometimes political conflicts and work in close collaboration with the state institutions (Ben Nefissa et al 2000, Haenni 2001). Both *râbta* and *majâlis 'urfiyya* testify that family/village/regional solidarities are active means of urban social control and urban solidarities and do not challenge the stability of the urban society

Third, the weight of regional lobby or regional networks have been a concern of Cairene local and national elections (Ben Nefissa 2004, Longuenesse 1997; Mursi 1988). In a number of areas, political parties have to look for a “regional” candidate and a number of newspapers complain that Upper Egyptian *'asabiyyât* were controlling the election in some areas of Cairo and Alexandria. These *'asabiyyat* are described as “traditional” types of organization reflecting a primary type of affiliation (family, lineage, tribe) which have been brought by the rural migrants into the city. But if the urban *'asabiyyât* reprocess traditional discursive devices (family ethics etc.), they, in fact, represent new forms of affiliation and organization, as can be seen in the case of Upper Egyptians.

In the case of Upper Egyptians, the potential political instrumentalization of regional *'asabiyyât* in Cairo relies partly on the emergence of a common Upper Egyptian identity/affiliation (*as-sa'idiyya*). An important dimension of the *sa'idiyya*, in the Cairo context, is the fact that it overpasses the traditional divisions of the Upper Egyptian society and enables the grouping of all Upper Egyptians, on the basis of a common regional and cultural origin (Miller 2004). Therefore, individuals who, because of their family status,

would have little or no chance to play a political role in their home region may become kind of “leaders” in Cairo. For this, they will resort to many means of mobilization like creating or participating in welfare associations, creating their own newspapers, developing a wide client networks, becoming members of local political assemblies, etc. This political and social activity is relayed by a strong cultural discourse, which mobilizes references to tradition, culture and religion in order to criticize the westernized Cairene elite and to legitimize the growing influence of the Upper Egyptian networks. These “new learders” will try to attract to them all their “baladiyyât”, i.e. “people from the same regional origin”. It may be noted here that the “regional origin” is a very fluid device, without fix geographical boundaries, which enable to attract more people on the base of a common cultural/religious ethics.

The expanding regional networks do not represent the former members of the small Upper Egyptian elite/aristocracy established in Cairo for more than a century. They rather represent an emerging class of people, linked to the economic changes of the *infitâh* period. Many members of this new class went to work in the Gulf countries before to definitely settle in Cairo and develop their own business. According to their individual itinerary, they can be very rich, living in first class neighborhoods like Muhandiseen or they can be small contractors living in the ‘*ashwa’iyyât*. Whatever the case, they will help to construct mosques, schools, etc., in the low income neighborhoods and they will be identified as ‘*ahl al kheyir*’ “People of Good” or as *kubâr al mantiqa* “Big ones of the area”. They are able to weave regional affiliation with urban activities and moral ethos.

8. A new urban vision?

Through their action and discourse, these Upper Egyptians local “leaders” participate in developing another vision of urban territories. This vision reproduces parts the traditional popular discourse (cf. the *baladi* ethics described by El Messiri 1978 and Singerman 1995)

which opposes the strong solidarity of the popular districts versus the individualism of the well-off districts. But the typical *ibn al balad* is supposed to be proud of its urban identity and rather disdainful toward the rural migrants. On the opposite, the Sa'idiyya discourse assumes the superiority of the Upper Egyptian moral values (like the sense of honor and solidarity, the respect of the elders, the attachment to kin solidarity, the respect of religious duties, etc.) and preach the need to transplant (*istaqlam*) the Upper Egyptian tradition and culture into the urban districts. Therefore people who stick to their regional culture and ethics are more able than the others to well behave in their district and to protect the social links of their area. As stated by a young educated man from Bulâq:

“Here, everybody is from the Sa'id, we share the same traditions. It is like a part of our home region. Here the social ties between the people are strong. If we quarrel, an elder will come and solve the problems. We organize a *majlis* [council] and we solve the problems. He is from Sohaj, I am Asyuti, but our habits are close. (...) We brought here the traditions of the Sa'id and we try to adapt them to the area. We are the majority and you find other peoples who take the Sa'idi habits because our social features are in agreement with the religion, with the tradition. So they are stable. And the newcomers have to adapt to us. And sometimes we are the newcomers but they (non-Sa'idi) are still the ones who have to adapt to us. Ties are stronger among us than among those from the Delta or Cairo. Our traditions form an entity and this comes from their similarity to religion. They are semi-sacred”

(Ustaz Jamal, 27 years old, born in Cairo, Commercial Diploma, an-Nahya district)

To what extent do these segments of the Cairene population develop or participates in a new vision of urbanity? It is not easy to answer this question. On the one hand, the *sa'idiyya* discourse reproduces well known rhetoric figures, like the representation of Upper Egypt as the locus of resistance and authenticity (*'asâla*) against colonization and westernization. This rhetorical figure has been part of the national discourse since at least the first part of the 20th c. (see the figure of Husayn Mu'nis in Roussillon 1992). On the other hand, the *sa'adiyya*

discourse reintroduces the notion of clan (*'a'ilat*), lineage (*bêt* or *badan*) and origin (*'asl*) as central values and pillars of the society, urban or not. These values are not antagonistic with the family ethos of the Cairene society but the *sa'idiyya* discourse (as well as the Islamic discourse) reinforce the legitimacy of “non-western” types of grouping (family/clan/tribe) upon individuals or other type of networks (trade union, political parties etc.). In this respect, the Sa'idiyya urban ethos seems very similar to the Gulfist urban model which is spreading as the “ideal model” in many Middle Eastern cities (Beyhum 1997). It is also very close to the Jordanian Bedouin popular nationalist genealogist discourse (Shryock 1997). Regional/communal solidarity and networks are by no ways the specificity of Upper Egyptians in Cairo and the ethics of the *sa'idiyya* discourse is shared by large segments of the Cairene population.

Conclusion

The fact that *'asabiyyat* are affirmation of modernity and not manifestation of tradition, has been mainly advanced in multi-confessional countries like Lebanon or in societies known for their clanic/tribal organization like Yemen, Oman or Jordan (Bocco 1995). The focus has been mainly on the relationship between the *'asabiyyat* and the state far less on the urban relevance of the *'asabiyyat* (Seurat 1985). The presence of *'asabiyyât* in a modern Global city like Cairo challenges our vision of modernity, which have difficulties to free itself from an ethnocentrism vision. Modernity and urbanization are still too often associated with developmental paradigms such as development of individual choice and freedom, shift from extended family to nuclear family, shift from primary affiliation (tribe, ethnic group etc.) to class affiliation, development of anonymity, etc.

The *'asabiyyât* are a contextual process of construction, which like other types of emerging collective grouping may use reference to tradition in order to adapt to changes. Communal and regional networks have for long existed in Cairo, under various forms and have played different roles. Today, regional networks have to be investigated in material-objective "facts" like spatial clustering or professional networks but also at a more symbolic level. Objectively, they may not be very present but subjectively they participate in the representation of the city and in its transformation.

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